Ælfric's apostles

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ABSTRACT

New Testament writings give a powerful sense of the humanness and fallibility of Christ's apostles, and a sense of their imperfection is also apparent in the non-canonical acts which report their missionary work and martyrdoms. Ælfric, drawing extensively on this biblical and extra-biblical material, adopts two distinct approaches in his treatment of the apostles, depending on whether he is writing hagiographically or exegetically. In neither approach does he present the apostles as imperfect or fallible, even where they appear so in the sources he is working with. The present article examines Ælfric's manoeuvres in rewriting the apostles as idealized and exemplary figures, focusing in particular on his treatment of Thomas, Peter and Paul in his homilies. In the case of Peter, Ælfric's approach is contrasted tellingly with that of the poet of *The Heliand*, who stresses the saint's powerful emotions and the personal nature of his relationship to Christ. The article demonstrates Ælfric's anxiety not to undermine the apostles in any way: bringing these great saints to life as struggling human beings is certainly not part of his agenda as religious teacher.

Ælfric of Eynsham, monk of the tenth-century reformed Benedictine tradition and prolific writer of Old English religious prose, writes a considerable amount about the apostles (the 'twelve' apostles and St Paul) and is interested both in their experiences in the gospels and Acts of the Apostles and in their later lives. Elsewhere, in the context of a discussion of treatments of the apostles in Old English, I have surveyed the writings of Ælfric on these great saints, highlighting in particular the institutional significance that they have for him as brought out in his cycles of homilies, in which they may be seen as contributing centrally to constructions of Christian knowledge and understanding.[1] In this article I wish to examine the two differing approaches to treating the apostles that are apparent in Ælfric's work and to exemplify these approaches with reference to his handling of three specific apostles.

Ælfric lists the apostles in his homily in the second series of *Catholic Homilies*[2]

[1] '*Cristes Leorningcnihtas*: Traditions of the Apostles in Anglo-Saxon England', *Aspects of Knowledge: Preserving and Reinventing Traditions of Learning in the Middle Ages*, ed. M. Cesario and H. Magennis (Manchester, forthcoming).

[2] In footnotes below the abbreviations *CH* I and *CH* II refer to the first and second series of

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'On the Feast Day of One Apostle' ('In Natale Unius Apostoli') and then again in his *Letter to Sigeweard* (*Treatise on the Old and New Testament*).[3] In the latter work he also tells about the writings of the apostles and of the other evangelists, and summarizes their missionary activities and their martyrdoms (lines 925–1014), noting scrupulously, however, that he was unable to find out anything about the death of Matthias (lines 665–6).[4] The writings in which he treats the apostles in more detail clearly fall into two main groups, his exegetical writings, in which he discusses New Testament episodes in which the apostles appear, and his hagiographical writings, based ultimately on New Testament apocrypha, in which he glorifies their flawless sanctity, though his treatment of episodes from Acts of the Apostles can contain elements of either approach. Notably, Ælfric has little to say about the epistles of the apostles, in which their voices are heard directly. The obvious reason for this is that his discussions of the apostles occur primarily in homiletic contexts in which his topic is determined by ecclesiastical considerations: he is explaining the gospel reading of the day or celebrating the edifying life of the saint whose feast day it is. But the lack of attention to the epistles also accords with the downplaying of personal and humanizing elements with regard to saints and biblical figures that have been observed in Ælfric's writings generally and, as shown below, that are illustrated strikingly in his accounts of the apostles themselves.[5]

Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*, respectively, and *LS* refers to Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* (full bibliographical details are given in subsequent notes).

[3] 'In Natale Unius Apostoli', *CH* II, XXXV, ed. M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series. Text*, EETS, ss 5 (Oxford, 1979), 299–303, lines 3–13; trans. B. Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric*, 2 vols. (London, 1844–6) II, 521–3; for the *Letter to Sigeweard* (*On the Old and New Testament*), see *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo: Vol. I*, ed. R. Marsden, EETS os 330 (Oxford, 2008), 201–30. Ælfric's homily 'In Natale Unius Apostoli' in *CH* II is immediately followed by a homily stated to be one for several apostles, 'In Natale Plurimorum Apostolorum' (*CH* II, XXXVI, ed. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 304–9; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* II, 529–37); as suggested by Malcolm Godden, however, and explained in detail by Joyce Hill, this is not a homily on the subject of the apostles but one for general use, to which the title was added at a later date: see M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS ss 18 (Oxford, 2000), 637; J. Hill, 'Ælfric, Leofric and *In Natale Plurimorum Apostolorum*', *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture*, ed. S. McWilliams (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 112–22.

[4] With reference to Ælfric's lack of knowledge about Matthias, Patrick Zettel tellingly points out that, unlike the other apostles, this saint does not appear in the major Latin source used by Ælfric for his hagiographical writings, a version of the 'Cotton–Corpus Legendary': see P. H. Zettel, 'Saints' Lives in Old English: Latin Manuscripts and Vernacular Accounts: Ælfric', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 17–37 (at 22–4).

[5] See, e.g., S. DeGregorio, 'Ælfric, *Gedwyld*, and Vernacular Hagiography: Sanctity and Spirituality in the Old English Lives of SS Peter and Paul', *Ælfric' s Lives of Canonised Popes*, ed. D. Scragg, *Old English Newsletter Subsidia* 30 (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001), 75–98; E. G. Whatley, 'Lost in Translation: Omission of Episodes in Some Old English Prose Saints' Legends',

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Ælfric's apostles

Ælfric's exegetical treatments of the apostles occur mainly in homilies in the *Catholic Homilies* cycles, and with the exception of that of Thomas, whose *passio* appears in the later collection *Lives of Saints*, the hagiographical treatments of all of the apostles (bar Matthias, as mentioned above) also occur in *Catholic Homilies*, which includes the lives of only the greatest saints, celebrated by the whole church. The *passio* of Thomas is deliberately omitted from *Catholic Homilies* partly due to Ælfric's scruples about one particular episode in the narrative, in which a cupbearer is punished after striking Thomas in the face, but Ælfric had second thoughts and included the *passio* of Thomas in *Lives of Saints*,[6] as well as including further material on Peter,[7] while a narrative about John in his old age is related in the *Letter to Sigeweard*.[8] In some of the items on apostles in *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric presents a discussion of a gospel-based theme (from the gospel reading for the day) and then moves on to a separate hagiographical account – based on a different source – of their missionary work, persecution and martyrdom, resulting in a composite text in which both approaches can be seen.[9] In other

ASE 26 (1997), 187–208; *idem*, 'Pearls before Swine: Ælfric's Vernacular Hagiography and the Lay Reader', *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J. E. Cross*, ed. T. N. Hall, with assistance from T. D. Hill and C. D. Wright, Med. European Stud. 1 (Morgantown, WV, 2002), 158–84.

[6] See *CH* II, 'Excusio Dictantis', ed. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 297–8, lines 15–16; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies*, II, 521, where Ælfric also explains that another reason for not translating the *passio* was that there already existed an Old English version in verse. In *LS* he says in a short Latin introduction to the Thomas translation that he has finally agreed to translate it in response to the persistent urgings of his patron, ealdorman Æthelweard: 'Passio Sancti Thome Apostoli', *LS*, XXXVI, ed. and trans. W. W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, EETS os 76, 82, 94 and 114 (London, 1881–1900; repr. as 2 vols., 1966) II, 398–425, lines 1–15. See F. M. Biggs, 'Ælfric's Comments about the *Passio Thomae*', *N&Q* ns 52 (2005), 5–8.

[7] See *LS* X, 'Chair of St Peter', ed. and trans. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* I, 218–39.

[8] See *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo*, ed. Marsden, lines 673–814 (pp. 223–7).

[9] See 'Natale Sancti Andreę Apostoli', *CH* I, XXXVIII, ed. P. Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the First Series. Text*, EETS ss 17 (Oxford, 1997), pp. 507–19; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* I, 577–99; 'Natale Sancti Mathei Apostoli et Euangelistæ', *CH* II, XXXII, ed. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 272–9; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* II, 469–81; 'Passio Apostolorum Petri et Pauli', *CH* I, XXVI, ed. Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 388–99; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* I, 365–85; 'Assumptio Sancti Iohannis Apostoli', *CH* I, IV, ed. Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 206–16; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* I, 59–77. A different type of two-part structure is found in Ælfric's homily for the separate feast day of St Peter, in which in the first part he retells the story from Acts (XII.1–23) of Peter's release from prison by an angel while in the second he offers a complex spiritual interpretation of the gospel episode of Peter walking on the waves, where the apostle loses his nerve and is rebuked by Jesus (Matthew XIV.22–36): 'In Festivitate Sancti Petri Apostoli', *CH* II, XXIV, ed. Godden, *Ælfric' s Catholic Homilies*, pp. 221–9; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* II, 381–95.

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accounts of apostles he concentrates exclusively on the apostle's later acts, with no reference to the gospels.[10]

The gospels give a powerful sense of the humanness and fallibility of Christ's disciples, notably of Thomas, who doubted the Resurrection, and, most insistently of all, Peter, who denied Christ on the eve of the Passion. Peter is a figure of great interest to the evangelists, providing a struggling, human perspective on the sublime events in which he is part witness, part participant, particularly those of the Passion. In one gospel episode he loses his nerve in attempting to walk on the waters – 'O thou of little faith, why dids't thou doubt?', exclaims Jesus (Matthew XIV.31)[11] – and on another occasion, just after his declaration of belief in Jesus as the Christ (which leads Jesus to call him the rock and to grant him the keys of the kingdom), he is upbraided by his Lord for thinking in earthly terms when he protests that it would never happen that Jesus would be put to death: Jesus rebukes him, 'Go behind me, Satan'; he exclaims, 'Thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men' (Matthew XVI.23). Early medieval homilists show great interest in trying to bring understanding of the moral and exemplary meaning of these failings, as they do also of the failings of Paul, a persecutor of Christ's followers before his experience on the road to Damascus. They seldom explore the human dimension of such figures, however (much less that of Christ himself); and hagiographers do not link the New Testament shortcomings of their subjects with their later acts.

For Ælfric, to introduce such humanizing – and compromising – material into his saints' lives would be to undermine his hagiographical purpose of glorifying the saints. Indeed, he often goes out of his way to excise such potentially complicating material when he comes across it, leaving his saints without human blemish.[12] As a homilist, he strives to explicate biblical passages which present the failings of the apostles, but in a way that plays down the human aspect of such failings and draws attention to their providential nature and their meaning for the lives of the members of his sermon audience. In his homilies

[10] See 'Passio Sancti Bartholomei Apostoli', *CH* I, XXXI, ed. Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 439–50; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* I, 455–77; 'Apostolorum Philippi et Iacobi', *CH* II, XVII, ed. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 169–73; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* II, 295–303; 'Natale Sancti Iacobi Apostoli', *CH* II, XXVII, ed. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 241–7; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* II, 413–25; 'Passio Sanctorum Apostolorum Simonis et Iude', *CH* II, XXXIII, ed. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 280–7; trans. Thorpe II, 481–99; for Thomas, see n. 6.

[11] Biblical quotations in Modern English are from the Douay-Rheims version, online at http://www.drbo.org/.

[12] On Ælfric's excising of unsuitable material, see DeGregorio, 'Ælfric, *Gedwyld*, and Vernacular Hagiography'; also, Whatley, 'Lost in Translation', pp. 187–208, and '*Pearls before Swine*', pp. 158–84.

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he comments on all three of the key New Testament episodes touched on just above, those of Thomas doubting the Resurrection, Peter denying Christ and Paul persecuting Christians. The remainder of this article will examine Ælfric's treatment of these episodes.

THOMAS

As noted above, Ælfric has a passion of St Thomas in his *Lives of Saints*. This gives an account of the saint's mission to India and his martyrdom. Thomas is an idealized figure and unsurprisingly in this hagiographical text there is no mention of the most famous thing of all about him, his doubting of the Resurrection. In his *Lives of Saints* account of Thomas, Ælfric presents an abbreviated adaptation of his Latin source,[13] adding some emotive colouring but cutting speeches and narrative detail. He does acknowledge some reluctance on the part of the saint to accept God's commission for him to go to India in the first place, but both in Ælfric and in his source this reluctance is less insistent than what we find in the Greek *Acts of Thomas*, in which Thomas flatly refuses to go.[14] One episode in the received legend of Thomas (in addition to the cupbearer scene) occasions evident anxiety on the part of Ælfric. This is the episode in which a wife, inspired by Thomas's teaching and with his approval, embraces chastity despite the demands of her pagan husband to the contrary. In transmitting this episode Ælfric, careful not to send a wrong message to husbands and wives in his audience, inserts a comment of his own by way of clarification, insisting that women must not unilaterally leave their husbands for religious reasons.[15]

[13] As demonstrated by Patrick Zettel, Ælfric's source was the 'Cotton–Corpus Legendary' variant of the version referred to today as *BHL* 8163; the Cotton-Corpus version has minor distinctive departures from the text available in the printed version edited by Mombritius: see *Passio Sancti Thomae Apostoli*, ed. B. Mombritius, *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Paris, 1910; original ed. 1480) II, 606–14. For Zettel's demonstration, see P. H. Zettel, 'Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in BL MS Cotton Nero E I + CCCC MS 9 and Other Manuscripts', unpubl. DPhil dissertation (Oxford Univ., 1979), pp. 259–62, and 'Saints' Lives in Old English', p. 22.

[14] In Ælfric, Thomas exclaims, 'Eala þu min drihten./send me þyder þe þu wille buton to þam indiscum', 'O my Lord, send me wherever you wish except to the Indians' (lines 22–3) (a direct translation of *Acta Thomae*, 'Domine quocumque uis mitte me : Praeter ad Indos', ed. Mombritius II, 606, line 16); cf. the Greek *Acts of Thomas*, in which Thomas declares, 'How can I, being a Hebrew, go among the Indians to proclaim the truth?', and when Christ himself instructs him to go, 'he would not obey, saying, "Wherever you wish to send me, send me, but elsewhere. For I am not going to the Indians"', trans. J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: a Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 447–8.

[15] Ælfric writes,

> Þæt wif moste þa swa hire wer forlætan
> for-þan-þe he hæþen wæs. and hetol ehtere.

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Although as a hagiographer Ælfric ignores the episode of Thomas's doubting, as an exegete and teacher he is interested in it. He focuses on the episode and its significance in one of the homilies in the first series of *Catholic Homilies*, that for the first Sunday after Easter, for which the prescribed gospel reading is John XX.19–31 (on appearances by Christ after the Resurrection, including that in which he assuages the doubts of Thomas).[16]

For Ælfric, following Gregory the Great,[17] the story of the doubting of Thomas has an immediate and practical application to his audience, for Thomas's touching of the side of Christ provides the great benefit of taking away the doubt of Christians. Thomas's doubting prompted Christ's words, greatly reassuring to all his later followers, 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed' (John XX.29). Ælfric declares, 'Ne getimode þam apostole þomę unforsceawedlice; þæt he ungeleafful wæs cristes æristes; Ac hit getimode þurh godes forescawunge; for ðan þurh his grapungæ. we sind geleaffulle; Mare us fremode his twynung; þonne þæra oðra apostola geleaffulnyss; For ðan þa ða he wæs gebroht to geleafan mid þære grapunge; þa wearð seo twynung þurh þæt us ætbroden.'[18] Referring to Christ's statement, 'Blessed are they who have not seen me, and yet believe in me,' Ælfric proclaims, using the inclusive first person plural, that these words greatly gladden us, for they apply to those who have not physically seen Christ and yet believe and who practise in their works that which they believe: 'Swyðe blissiað þas word us; þe her æfterfyliað; gesælige beoð þa ðe me ne gesawon; 7 þeah on me gelyfað; Mid þam cwyde sind þa ealle getacnode þe crist on lichaman ne gesawon; 7 þeahhwæðere hine healdað on heora mode. þurh geleafan; Se gelyfð soðlice on god; se ðe mid

> ac canones swa-þeah cweðaþ. and beodað þæt nan wif
> ne sceole hire wer forlætan swilce for eawfæstnysse.
> buton him bam swa gelicige. (lines 385–9)

('The wife could thus leave her husband, because he was a heathen and a hateful persecutor; but the canons nevertheless say and command that no woman shall leave her husband on the plea of religion unless it so please them both' (trans. Skeat, II, 423, modified)).

For Ælfric's views on arrangements for chaste marriages, see P. Jackson, 'Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage: a Reconsideration of the *Life of St Æthelthryth*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 235–60; R. K. Upchurch, *Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses With Modern English Parallel-Text Translations: 'Julian and Basilissa', 'Cecilia and Valerian', and 'Chrysanthus and Daria'* (Exeter, 2007).

[16] 'Dominica I post Pasca', *CH*, XVI, ed. Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 307–12; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* I, 231–9.

[17] See Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, pp. 127–35.

[18] Lines 93–8: 'It happened to the apostle Thomas not unprovidentially, that he was unbelieving of Christ's resurrection, but it happened by the providence of God; for through his touching, we are believing. Of greater benefit to us was his doubt than the faith of the other apostles; for when he was brought to belief by that touching, doubt was thereby taken from us' (trans. Thorpe, I, 235).

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weorcum begæð þæt ðæt he gelyfð.'[19] In Ælfric's interpretation of the scene the moral culpability of Thomas and the personal aspect of his lack of faith are excluded from consideration. In his doubting and subsequently in touching Christ's wound, he fulfils a good role, acting in accordance with divine providence. He demonstrates the reality of the Resurrection and brings Christ's blessing upon later generations of the faithful, including the people Ælfric is directly addressing. Thus the homily audience are not only confirmed in their belief in the Resurrection but brought to awareness of how the words of Christ are intended to apply to them; they have their own place in God's providential scheme. Neither Thomas's humanity nor his sanctity is of relevance to the role he is seen as playing in this providential scheme. Indeed, for Ælfric to draw attention to either of these would distract from the message that is the focus of his interest in interpreting this famous episode.

PETER

For Ælfric, Peter is the rock upon which Christ built his Church, the apostle to whom he gave the keys of the kingdom. He discusses the speech in which Christ referred to Peter in these terms (Matthew XVI.17–20) in the first part of his two-part homily for the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul in the first series of *Catholic Homilies* (the second part is a separate narrative account of the wonder-working contest between Peter and Paul and the magician Simon Magus in Nero's Rome and of the ensuing martyrdoms of the two saints)[20] and again in the homily for St Peter in the second series.[21] In the former homily he ignores the scene that immediately follows, in which Peter is rebuked by his Lord for thinking in an earthly, limited, way (Matthew XVI.23), stressing Peter's 'true belief' rather than his earthly limitations: 'Nu todælde petrus swutelice þone soðan geleafan. þa ða he cwæð. þu eart crist þas lifiendan godes sunu.'[22] But Ælfric addresses Peter's loss of nerve in the homily in the second series, in which he explains that Peter dared to go on the sea through Christ but that he also recognized his own human weakness; the moral lesson of the episode is that of trust in Christ (lines 191–229).

[19] Lines 102–7: 'Greatly gladden us the words which here follow, "Blessed are they who have not seen me, and yet believe in me." By that saying are betokened all those who have not seen Christ in the body, and, nevertheless, hold him in their mind through faith. For he believes in God, who by works practises that which he believes' (trans. Thorpe, I, 235).

[20] On this part, see DeGregorio, 'Ælfric, *Gedwyld*, and Vernacular Hagiography'; Whatley, '*Pearls before Swine*', pp. 168–73; on the homily as a whole, see M. R. Godden, 'Experiments in Genre: the Saints' Lives in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*', *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1996), pp. 261–87, at 269–71.

[21] For references, see n. 9, above.

[22] Lines 46–7: 'Now Peter manifestly distinguished the true belief, when he said, "Thou art Christ, Son of the living God"' (trans. Thorpe, I, 367).

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Ælfric's treatment of Peter's denial comes in the course of his homily in the second series of *Catholic Homilies* for Palm Sunday, which relates the story of the Last Supper and the Passion, drawing on all four gospels to produce a (selective) harmonized account of the monumental events of this sacred story, compellingly narrated.[23] Ælfric incorporates passages of literal and allegorical explication in the course of his narrative, without, however, detracting from the impetus of the dramatic story, which he relates with considerable rhetorical power, masterfully exploiting rhythm and alliteration.[24] Godden contrasts Ælfric's method in this homily, in which commentary is incorporated into the narrative, with his more common practice of giving the full gospel narrative first before turning to interpretation.[25] Doubtless, Ælfric considered that his normal procedure would be unsuitable for treating the sustained gospel narrative associated with Palm Sunday.

The larger context of the episode of Peter's denial is the story of the arrest of Jesus, leading to his trial, death and resurrection. Just before it had come the scene in which Peter rashly drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of those who had come to arrest Jesus (Matthew XXVI.51–4, John XVIII.10–11). Ælfric includes both these famous episodes concerning Peter, the arrest and the denial, in his version, though he does not explicitly link them or suggest a developing 'human' picture of Peter in relation to the Passion. He misses out altogether the great scene of the 'agony in the garden', in which Peter, among others, had failed to keep watch with his Lord and had been rebuked by Jesus for his lack of strength (Matthew XXVI.40–6, Mark XIV.37–42). It is likely that he has omitted this episode because of its emphasis on the human weakness not only of the disciples but, more disconcertingly, of Jesus himself, who prayed that the chalice of his Passion might pass him by (Matthew XXVI.39, 42). He prefers not to highlight Jesus's humanity here, just as later in his narrative of the Passion he omits his anguished cry on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew XXVII.46).

Ælfric's account of the episode of Peter's denial is concise and factual, though enlivened by judicious touches of detail, added by Ælfric himself, some of which are highlighted by alliteration: according to Ælfric, Peter stood 'chilled' in the hall (*Petrus stod ofcalen. on ðam cauertune*, line 131) on the occasion of his first denial; the fire at which he warmed himself was a large one (*æt micclum fyre*, line 131); and afterwards the cock 'sang loudly' (*hludswege sang*, line 137); earlier Jesus had foretold that Peter would deny him three times

[23] 'Dominica Palmarum: De Passione Domini', *CH* II, XIV, ed. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 137–49; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* II, 241–63.

[24] See Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 474.

[25] *Ibid.*

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before the cock crowed 'beating its wings (?)' (*ær ðan ðe se hana. hafitigende crawe*, lines 75–6).

Addressing the troubling topic of Peter's threefold denial, Ælfric asks, 'Hwi wolde æfre geðafian. se ælmihtiga wealdend. þæt his gecorena ðegen. þe he eallum gesette. geleaffulum leodum. lareow and hyrde. þæt he hine for yrcðe. swa oft wiðsoce?'[26] Ælfric follows the scriptural account in saying that Peter wept bitterly about this episode but he makes no attempt to elaborate on his feelings or to empathize with him; nor is there any criticism of Peter. Christ allowed Peter, his chosen *ðegen*, to deny him in order to teach him that he should show mercy (*gemiltsian*, line 144) towards the weak, as the Almighty had to him.[27] Similarly, there had been a moral lesson for Ælfric in the episode, just prior to the denial, of Peter and the sword. Again, Ælfric shows no interest in the feelings of Peter at this time, apart from noting that he acted 'boldly' (*bealdlice*, line 92); for Ælfric the significance of the episode is that it teaches that servants of God should not use weapons, a message that he sees as applying in his own day: he writes, in a passage unparalleled in his possible sources, 'he forbead þæt gewinn. mid wordum ðearle. þæt nan godes ðeow ne sceolde. on him sylfum truwian. ne mid wæpnum winnan wið woruldlicum cempum. gif he cristes fotswaðum filigan wile.'[28]

The mode is exegetical and Ælfric does not pause to express an attitude towards Peter's conduct – though in a subsequent passage he takes the opportunity to excoriate Judas personally for his treachery, as well as explaining the allegorical significance of his crime (the 'bought field' where Judas died signifies the world in which humankind lives as strangers (lines 162–3)): 'Miserably the impious traitor (*se arleasa læwa*) repented his wicked deeds with his own death.'[29] The sense of emotional devastation on the part of Peter suggested in the gospels is not mentioned in Ælfric's explication of the denial, and the grand theme of loss of courage and betrayal introduced in the gospels' account of the Last Supper and developed in the subsequent Passion narrative – which we might imagine would be particularly congenial in an Anglo-Saxon vernacular context – significantly is not one that Ælfric chooses to highlight.

The episode of Peter's denial also appears in an Old English retelling in

[26] Lines 139–42: 'Why would the Almighty Ruler ever allow that his chosen servant, whom he had set as a teacher and guardian over all believing people, should through fear so often deny him?' (trans. Thorpe, II, 251).

[27] Godden cites Gregory the Great, *Homilia* 21, as a possible source for this reading (*Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 479).

[28] Lines 110–13: 'he strongly forbade the contest by his words, that no servant of God should trust to himself, nor with weapons strive against worldly soldiers, if he will follow the footsteps of Christ' (trans, Thorpe, II, 249).

[29] Lines 159–60; trans. Thorpe, modified, II, 251.

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the first homily of the Vercelli collection, and in the reworked version of this in manuscript Bodley 340.[30] The (anonymous) Vercelli/Bodley account is a straightforward narrative, following John XVIII but also drawing upon the other gospels, with very little in the way of exegetical comment. It provides a much fuller account than Ælfric does, however, including the addition of some dramatic colouring. It personalizes the relationship of Peter and Jesus by the use of the term *þegn* (changed to *gefera*, 'companion', in Bodley 340),[31] and when Peter denies Jesus for the second time he does so 'very sharply' (*swiðe scearpe*, line 48);[32] the Vercelli/Bodley version also picks up the personalizing detail, not mentioned by Ælfric, that one of the people to whom Peter made his denial was related to the man whom Peter had wounded earlier (cf. John XVIII.26): 'wæs þæs mannes cuða 7 geþofta þe Petrus ær gewundode 7 him þæt swiðre eare ofasloh'.[33]

There are interesting differences of emphasis in the presentation of Peter in the Ælfric and Vercelli/Bodley accounts of the Passion, with a greater sense of the human dimension of the episode coming out in the anonymous version than is the case with Ælfric. Just as with Thomas in the 'doubting Thomas' episode, Ælfric emphasizes God's good purpose in the episode of Peter's denial – teaching Peter, who was given the responsibility of having the keys of the kingdom of heaven (line 145), the lesson of mercy towards others – thereby deflecting attention from his responsibility and predicament.

For a much more radical contrast with the approach of Ælfric to the episode of Peter's denial we must turn to a version in verse, not in Old English but in the closely related (West Germanic) language Old Saxon. We have no surviving New Testament narrative poetry in Old English but there is a poem on the life of Christ in Old Saxon, *The Heliand*.[34] Old Saxon was the language of continental neighbours of the Anglo-Saxons, who were converted by English missionaries and who shared with the Anglo-Saxons an inherited Germanic poetic tradition; more particularly, the tradition of religious verse in Old Saxon

[30] Ed. D. G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS os 300 (Oxford, 1992), 7–47.

[31] The Vercelli account of the first denial reads "'Ac ne eart ðu þysses mannes þegn þe her oferfangen is?" þa onsoc he sona 7 cwæð þæt he his [þegn] ne wære' (ed. Scragg, lines 26–8): "'Are you not a thegn of this man who has been arrested here?" Then he answered immediately and said that he was not his [thegn]' (Bodley 340, "'Ac ne eart þu þyses mannes gefera þe her oferfangen is?" Þa ætsoc he sona, Petrus, 7 cwæð þæt he his gefera nære' (ed. Scragg, lines 150–1)).

[32] Bodley 340 omits *scearpe* (ed. Scragg, line 170).

[33] Vercelli, lines 50–1: 'he was the kinsman and companion of the man whom Peter had wounded previously and whose right ear he had struck off' (Bodley 340: 'þæs mannes cuða 7 geðorfta wæs þe Petrus ær þæt eare ofasloh' (ed. Scragg, lines 171–2)).

[34] Ed. O. Behaghel, *Heliand und Genesis*, 9th ed., rev. B. Taeger, Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 4 (Tübingen, 1984), 7–210; trans. G. R. Murphy, *The Heliand: the Saxon Gospel* (New York, 1992).

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is widely believed to have been influenced, if not inspired, by the Anglo-Saxon 'Cædmonian' tradition of biblical narrative poetry.[35] *The Heliand* is a long account (5938 lines, and it is incomplete) of the life of Christ, based on a version of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, a harmonization of the four gospels into a single coherent narrative.[36] Two Latin prefaces associated with the poem, relating how its poet was enabled to compose scriptural verse through divine intervention, strongly resemble Bede's famous story of the poet Cædmon.[37] It is thought that *The Heliand* was composed in the mid-ninth century in a German monastery 'with strong Anglo-Saxon roots' (as Rolf Bremmer puts it).[38] It is likely that this monastery was Fulda (founded by Boniface) or one of the houses associated with Fulda.

Peter is a 'crucial figure'[39] in the drama of *The Heliand* (as in that of the gospels themselves). He has been described as the author's favourite character.[40] The poet brings the episode of his denial to life in an extended treatment which emphasizes Peter's personal relationship to his Lord and which, drawing powerfully on the emotional resources of Germanic poetic tradition, displays a compelling sense of the apostle's awareness of the enormity of his failure of loyalty towards that Lord. In the climactic sections of the poem the story of Peter is skilfully interwoven with the main story of the Passion and with that of the betrayal of Judas, presenting a moving demonstration of human

[35] On Old English and Old Saxon poetry as having a shared poetic tradition, see R. L. Kellogg, 'The South Germanic Oral Tradition', *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in honor of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr*, ed. J. B. Bessinger and R. P. Creed (New York, 1965), pp. 66–74; A. N. Doane, *The Saxon Genesis: an Edition of the West Saxon Genesis B and the Old Saxon Vatican Genesis* (Madison, WI, and London, 1991), pp. 89–92.

[36] *Tatian, Lateinisch und Altdeutsch*, ed. E. Sievers, 2nd. ed., Bibliothek der ältesten deutschen Litteratur-Denkmäler 5 (Paderborn, 1892); for an important recent discussion, see W. I. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae: Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language 25 (Leiden, 1994).

[37] See R. Bremmer, 'Continental Germanic Influences', *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne (Oxford, 2001), pp. 375–87, at 382–3; for Bede's account of Cædmon, see his *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV. xxiv, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 414–21.

[38] Bremmer, 'Continental Germanic Influences', p. 383; see also P. Wormald, 'Anglo-Saxon Society and its Literature', *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1–22, at 8–9. For a range of recent studies of *The Heliand* and its background, see *Perspectives on the Old Saxon Heliand: Introductory and Critical Essays, with an Edition of the Leipzig Fragment*, ed. V. A. Pakis, Med. European Stud. 12 (Morgantown, WV, 2010).

[39] G. R. Murphy, *The Saxon Savior: the Transformation of the Gospel in the Ninth-Century Heliand* (New York, 1989), p. 57.

[40] Murphy, *The Heliand*, p. 101, n. 143.

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strength and weakness in a biblical world recast as the world of the Germanic comitatus.[41]

The personal relationship between the retainer Peter and his Lord Jesus had been brought out in the earlier scene in the poem of Peter walking on the water, in which, in contrast to Ælfric's exegetical reading, mentioned above, the emotions of Peter and the solicitude of Jesus are stressed. Peter feels the fear of the deep water and watches the waves being driven by the wind. The poet presents Jesus as guiding his panicking follower. He encourages Peter rather than rebuking him. Jesus does not exclaim, 'O thou of little faith' (Matthew XIV.31); instead, he addresses Peter mildly and (in an addition to the gospel narrative) he takes him by the hand and leads him safely back to the boat (lines 2957–62). Similarly, in the episode in which Peter insists that Jesus will not be put to death (Matthew XVI.21–8), the *Heliand* poet softens the rebuke of the apostle by his Lord:

> Thô sprak imu eft is hêrro angegin,
> mâri mahtig Crist – uuas imu an is môde hold –:
> 'huat, thu nu uuiðeruuard bist', quað he, 'uuilleon mînes,
> thegno bezto!'[42]

Christ's fondness for Peter is highlighted here, as is the esteem in which he holds him. There is no 'Go behind me, Satan' (Matthew XVI.23).

At the Last Supper, when Jesus prophesies that his disciples will desert him, Peter's confident reply that he will never lose courage (Matthew XXVI.33, Mark XIV.29, Luke XXII.33) is greatly expanded in the Old Saxon account:

> Sîmon Petrus thô,
> thegan uuið is thiodan thrîstuuordun sprac
> bi huldi uuið is hêrron: 'thoh thi all thit heliðo folc', quathie,
> 'gisuîcan thîna gisîðos, thoh ik sinnon mid thi
> at allon tharaƀon tholoian uuilliu.
> Ik biun garo sinnon, ef mi god lâtið,
> that ik an thînon fullêstie fasto gistande;
> thoh sia thi an carcaries clûstron hardo,
> these liudi bilûcan, thoh ist mi luttil tueho,
> ne ik an them bendion mid thi bîdan uuillie,
> liggian mid thi sô lieƀen; ef sia thînes lîƀes than
> thuru eggia nîð âhtian uuilliad,
> frô mîn thie guodo, ik giƀu mîn ferah furu thik

[41] For further commentary on the denial of Peter and related episodes in *The Heliand*, see *Hêliand: Text and Commentary*, ed. J. E. Cathey, Med. European Stud. 2 (Morgantown, WV, 2002).

[42] Lines 2998b–3001: 'Then his Lord, the great, powerful, Christ, answered him – he was deeply fond of Peter. "What, now it is you, best of thanes, who are against my will!"' (trans. Murphy, p. 101).

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an uuâpno spil: nis mi uuerð iouuiht
te bimîðanne, sô langо sô mi mîn uuarod
hugi endi handcraft.'[43]

The composure of this sustained speech, with its insistent use of concessives, suggests that Peter is certain of himself in all circumstances.[44] He is the warrior boasting in the hall of his loyalty and courage, like the Geats in *Beowulf*, who had promised to repay on the battlefield the generosity of their lord but were later rebuked by Wiglaf for failing at the moment of truth.[45] In the light of Peter's certainty at the feast, his later faintheartedness appears all the more shocking, not least to Peter himself, bringing self-awareness and shame. The poem's Germanic-heroic ethos provides the means by which the enormity of Peter's failure is realized.

Soon after the scene in which Peter makes his boast, he is shown acting with resolution and courage when he sees his lord in danger. Peter the warrior, demonstrating his loyalty to his lord, springs into action when Christ's enemies come to arrest him. Here he acts without hesitation, cutting off the ear of Malchus:

ni uuas imu is hugi tuîfli,
blôð an is briostun, ac he is bil atôh,
suerd bi sîdu, slôg imu tegegnes
an thene furiston fiund folmo crafto,
that thô Malchus uuarð mâkeas eggiun,
an thea suîðaron half suerdu gimâlod. [46]

Peter is the good, if misguided, retainer here, by the side of his lord, but his real test is yet to come, away from the public arena of battle.

[43] Lines 4673b–4688: 'Simon Peter then spoke words of confidence, the thane said graciously to his Commander and Lord, "Even if this entire group of warrior-heroes", he said, "Your warrior-companions, should desert You, I am always willing to suffer any hardships together with You! I am always ready, if God lets me, to help You, to stand at Your side without wavering. Even if these people lock You up deep in the dungeon, I have little doubt that I will stay with You in chains, lying with You whom I love so much. If they then want to take away Your life with the blade's hatred, my good Lord, I will give my life-spirit for You in the play of weapons; and I will not give ground as long as my mind lasts and my arm has its strength"' (trans. Murphy, p. 154).

[44] Cf. also the heroic speech of Thomas at lines 3995–4002 (based on John XI.16, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him'); this is discussed by R. Woolf, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with Their Lord in *Germania* and in *The Battle of Maldon*', *ASE* 5 (1976), 63–81, at 73.

[45] See *Beowulf* (ASPR IV, 3–98), lines 2631–60 and 2862–91.

[46] Lines 4871b–4876: 'No doubting in his mind, no fearful hesitation in his chest, he drew his blade and struck straight ahead at the first man of the enemy with all the strength in his hands, so that Malchus was cut and wounded on the right side by the sword' (trans. Murphy, p. 160).

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On *Oliuetiberg*, 'the mountain of Olivet' (line 4719), Jesus himself had experienced fear as he contemplated what lay ahead, his mind and body in conflict:

> fader alothiado
> gôdan grôtte, gornwordun sprac
> hriuuiglîco: uuas imu is hugi drôbi,
> bi theru menniski môd gihrôrid,
> is flêsk uuas an fortun.[47]

He stiffens his resolve, however, and tells his disciples (including Peter), who have been sleeping, what he intends, encouraging them too to be resolute:

> mîn flêsk is an sorgun,
> letid mik mîn lîchamo: lêð is imu suîðo
> uuîti te tholonne. Ik thoh uuillean scal
> mînes fader gefrummien. Hebbiad gi fasten hugi.[48]

When the disciples do desert Jesus and Peter denies him, the poet is quick to point out that this was in accordance with providence: the disciples could not have avoided it – 'ni mahtun sie is bemîðan' (line 4936a) – and Peter's failure too was predestined:

> Ni habda is uuordo geuuald: it scolde giuuerðen sô,
> sô it the gemarcode, the mankunnies
> faruuardot an thesaru uueroldi. [49]

But though the actions of the apostles are explained by reference to divine providence and later it is pointed out that Peter's denial had the good effect of teaching the future leader of the church the importance of forgiveness (lines 5029–38), the emphasis in these scenes is on human emotion rather than exegetical explanation. Peter's nervousness about being found to be a follower of Jesus is conveyed by means of the unflattering description of the serving maid to whom he makes his first denial: the stress on her bad qualities (*fêkni*, 'cunning', line 4954; *unuuânlîk*, 'unattractive', line 4957) suggests that we are seeing this annoying woman through Peter's eyes; the poet also adds the detail that Peter avoided Jesus in front of the crowd (*mêð is thô for theru menegi*, 'he

[47] Lines 4746b–4750: 'He spoke to the good Father of all peoples, He said words of lamentation and grief. His mind was clouded and afraid; in His humanness His feelings were upset. His flesh was frightened' (trans. Murphy, p. 156).

[48] Lines 4782b–4785: 'My flesh is worried, My body is holding Me back, it is very loath to suffer pain. Despite this, I will still do what My Father wants done. You keep your minds steadfast!' (trans. Murphy, p. 157).

[49] Lines 4978–80: 'He had no control over his words. It was supposed to happen that way. It had been thus determined by the One who is the Protector of mankind in this world' (trans. Murphy, p. 164).

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avoided him then before the crowd', line 4963); and his denials become more forceful at each iteration, until finally, to the relative of the man whose ear he had cut off, he swears on his life (lines 4986–9).

After the cock crows and Jesus looks at Peter, the apostle is overwhelmed with guilt and remorse. 'There is no hero so old', says the poet, 'that he has ever seen any man's son more deeply regret (*sêrur hreuuan*) his own words with tears and lamentation.'[50] The *Heliand* poet greatly expands on the simple biblical statement, 'And going forth, he wept bitterly' (Matthew XXVI.75). Peter is provided with an eloquent speech in which he expresses a profound sense of his sin and unworthiness, asserting that he sees no reason to be grateful that he was ever born into the world. The speech concludes,

> Ni bium ik nu thes uuirðig, uualdand frô mîn,
> that ik under thîne iungaron gangan môti,
> thus sundig under thîne gesîðos: ik iro selbo scal
> mîðan an mînumu môde, nu ik mi sulic mên gesprac.[51]

Only perhaps in *The Dream of the Rood* is there anything in surviving Old English literature that approaches *The Heliand* in the emotional intensity of its treatment of events relating to the life of Christ and in its focus on the human feelings of the participants in those events.

We may conclude this section by observing that, in *The Heliand*, Peter is an interesting, and troubling, character, because of his weaknesses as well as his strengths; in Ælfric he is, as it were, detached from his weaknesses and from the consequences of human relationship and is represented as an essentially unproblematic figure. Unlike Ælfric, the poet of *The Heliand* uses the resources of the Germanic tradition of heroic poetry to make Peter into a figure that the audience can understand and relate to.[52] Though there is no surviving New Testament narrative poetry in Old English, Old English poets, such as those of *Andreas*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Genesis B* and *Judith*, do make use of heroic tradition in various ways, to re-present Christian narrative in terms familiar from Germanic secular poetry. Ælfric steers clear of the heroic world altogether, avoiding any suggestion that his saints should be seen in the terms of Germanic heroism, which are worldly terms, at best distracting, at worst inimical to Christian teaching. And unlike the poet of *The Heliand* his concern is not

[50] Lines 5008–11; trans. Murphy, p. 165.

[51] Lines 5017–20: 'I am now unworthy, my Lord Ruler, of walking among Your followers, I am too sinful to be with Your warrior-companions. I will avoid them in my feelings, now that I have said such criminal things' (trans. Murphy, p. 165).

[52] On the audience of continental Germanic literature, see R. McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789–895* (London, 1977), pp. 184–205; McKitterick argues for the role of such writing in providing material for priests and monks, many of whom were acknowledged to be lacking in Latin and ignorant.

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to produce figures that his audience could identify with but figures they could learn from and figures they could wonder at. With respect to Peter, Ælfric does not wish make him 'interesting' as a character; and he certainly does not wish to make him troubling.

PAUL

In the context of the idealized model of sanctity of early medieval hagiography, Paul would have presented a particularly challenging figure, especially for someone as decided in his approach to writing about saints as Ælfric clearly was. Paul, according to the authority of the Bible (Acts IX.1–19), had, as Saul, been a keen persecutor of Christians before his own conversion. Paul's *passio*, as relayed by Ælfric in his first series homily for the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul,[53] does not mention his pre-Christian period. No surprise there. But in his exegetical homily for the feast day of St Stephen in the first series of *Catholic Homilies* Ælfric does acknowledge Paul's diligence in suppressing Christianity, and he addresses the issue more fully in his homily in the same series for the feast day of St Paul.[54] In the homily on St Stephen he follows closely passages from Acts VI.5–VII.59, and in his commentary on these his emphasis, mostly based on Caesarius of Arles and Fulgentius,[55] is very much on the true love of the protomartyr, which brought Paul to redemption. The homily stresses the transformative power of love, which, insists Ælfric, can work in the lives of those he is addressing in the homily. He draws a contrast between the holiness of Stephen, who prayed for those who stoned him, and the impiety of Paul: 'Saulus heold þæra leasra gewitena reaf; 7 heora mod to þæræ stæninge geornlice tihte; stephanus soðlice gebigedum cneowum drihten bæd. þæt he saulum alysde; Wearð þa stephanes ben fram gode gehyred; 7 saulus wearð alysed; Se arfæsta wæs gehyred. 7 se arleasa wearð gerihtwisod.'[56] Here Ælfric even has Saul instigating the stoners, giving him a more active role than he is allotted in the Acts of the Apostles account.

The lesson that Ælfric draws from the Acts narrative is that of prayer and the power of love, which he asks the sermon audience to apply in their lives, imitating in some degree – 'geefenlæcan be summum dæle' (line 131) – the

[53] See n. 9, above.

[54] 'Passio Beati Stephani Protomartiris', *CH* I, III, ed. Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 198–205; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* I, 45–57; 'Natale Sancti Pauli Apostoli', *CH* I, XXVII, ed. Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, pp. 401–9; trans. Thorpe, *Homilies* I, 385–400.

[55] See Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, pp. 21–8.

[56] Lines 107–11: 'Saul held the garments of the false witnesses, and zealously instigated their minds to the stoning. But Stephen with bended knees besought the Lord that he would redeem Saul. Stephen's prayer was heard, and Saul was redeemed. The pious one was heard, and the impious justified' (trans. Thorpe, I, 51).

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example of Stephen. To the extent that hagiographical impulses on the part of Ælfric are evident in the homily, they are directed towards Stephen, whom Ælfric presents as remaining serene at the time of his cruel death.

In the homily for St Stephen's Day, Paul functions not as a hagiographical figure but as the beneficiary of Stephen's sanctity. Through Stephen, Paul experiences *gecyrrednyss*, 'conversion' (line 192): love, says Ælfric, covered over the greatness of his sins – 'oferwreah synna micelnysse' (line 121). In emphasizing the completeness of Paul's conversion, Ælfric even climactically suspends use of the name Paul until after Stephen makes his prayer on behalf of his persecutors: 'witodlice næfde godes gelaðung paulum to lareowe; gif se halga martyr stephanus swa ne bæde.'[57] He had been introduced, following Acts VII.57, simply as a certain youth called Saul ('sumes geonges cnihtes; Se wæs geciged saulus' (lines 53–4)), and Ælfric chooses not to take the opportunity to provide an affective hagiographical dimension to his account of this youth. Saul/Paul is an *exemplum*, a sinner who comes to redemption through love; Stephen is a saint through whose personal intercession a great teacher comes to Christ. A somewhat similar approach to the Saul–Stephen episode is evident in the Old English poem *Elene* (lines 489–510).

Ælfric betrays a greater sense of discomfort with the idea of a sinful St Paul in the other homily about him, the one for his feast day. He is writing a homily here, not a saint's life, but his focus is on the apostle himself this time and he goes out of his way to present him here as not bad even in his anti-Christian phase. In a passage without parallel in known sources,[58] he firmly moves the biblical account into the realm of hagiography, thereby necessitating some special pleading in defence of a figure who is ostensibly far from admirable. Ælfric insists on behalf of Paul that as a persecutor he acted out of ignorance – 'þurh his nytennysse' (line 10) – and (more lamely) that he did not actually kill anyone with his own hands (lines 12–13). He does not mention the detail in Acts (VII.57) of Saul holding the clothes of the people who stoned Stephen to death, though he acknowledges that he consented to this killing (lines 11–12; cf. Acts VII.59).

For Ælfric, presenting Paul in hagiographical terms, it is important to make a special case for him, which he does by arguing that Paul was steadfastly faithful to the Old Law, which God had established by miracles and entrusted to his people. Recasting the fanatical Paul of the Acts of the Apostles, who went about 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter' (IX.1), Ælfric insists that he did not persecute Christians out of hate – adding, in an aside, 'as the Jews

[57] Lines 113–14: 'Verily the church of God would not have had Paul as a teacher, if the holy martyr Stephen had not thus prayed' (trans. Thorpe, I, 53).

[58] See Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 223; see also Godden's incisive discussion of this homily in 'Experiments in Genre', pp. 271–2.

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did' – but as a sincere advocate and defender of the Old Law: 'Paulus ehte cristenra manna. na mid niðe swa swa ða iudeiscan dydon; ac he wæs midspręca 7 bewerigend þære ealdan æ. mid micelre anrædnysse; wende þæt cristes geleafa wære wiðerwinna þære ealdan gesetnysse.'[59] Paul had been a seeker after truth, not recognizing that the very truth that he sought had now been revealed.

On the road to Damascus when a blinding heavenly light shines upon him he hears a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' (Acts IX.4). Ælfric translates this sentence word for word in his homily on Paul but in explicating it he fills out the biblical verse with an added explanatory clause: 'saule. hwi ehtst þu min Ic eom se soðfæstnyss þe ðu werast.'[60] The added clause, which has no known source, has the effect of providing divine recognition of the good (if mistaken) motivation lying behind Saul's opposition to Christianity. No such good motivation is contemplated for other Jews, who opposed Christianity out of hate.

Discussing the passage on Paul the persecutor, Godden rightly comments, 'Ælfric resolutely defends Paul from criticism, even before his conversion, selects and reshapes the material to present Paul as a dominant and saintly figure and to shield the other disciples from criticism, and uses epithets characteristic of his own saints' lives – *godes cempa*, *wælhreow ehtere*, *þam gecorenean cempan*'.[61] Ælfric's way of accommodating the unedifying Paul to his required hagiographical model is to play down the extent of his wickedness, allowing him to adopt the role of severe defender of truth and scourge of those who threaten it. Such a figure seems acceptable to Ælfric, even when that figure's motivation is based on a mistaken perception.

At the same time, however, as being drawn to present Paul in the mould of the faultless saint in this sermon, Ælfric is drawn to use the narrative of his conversion in a completely contradictory way, with Paul (as in the St Stephen homily) as moral example rather than hagiographical hero. In this homiletic interpretation, the magnitude of Paul's conversion is the key aspect of the story: rather than engaging in special pleading on behalf of Paul, Ælfric uses him as a supreme illustration of the theme of turning from sin to God. As he develops this theme, instead of playing down Paul's fanaticism in persecution, he refers to him as *se wælhreowa ehtere* [62] and *þone arleasan Saulum*.[63] In adopting

[59] Lines 66–70: 'Paul persecuted christian men, not with hate, as the Jews did, but he was a partisan and defender of the old law with great steadfastness; he thought that the faith of Christ was an adversary to the old covenant' (Thorpe, I, 389).

[60] Lines 76–7: 'Saul, why persecutest thou me? I am the Truth which thou defendest' (trans. Thorpe, I, 391).

[61] Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 221.

[62] Line 42: 'the cruel persecutor' (Thorpe, p. 389).

[63] Line 91: 'the impious Saul' (Thorpe, p. 391).

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this critical language, Ælfric is following a venerable line in patristic teaching, in particular being guided by the scathing condemnation of Paul by that other famous convert, Augustine of Hippo, who, of course, was merciless in his self-reproach about his own sins.[64] The contradictory result of this treatment is that in the homily Ælfric can be seen attempting to present the pre-conversion Paul both in hagiographical (sympathetic) terms and (as a figure of conversion) in moral terms. In his explication Ælfric refers to pride turning to humility, unrighteousness turning to righteousness, impiety to piety, and the wolf that becomes a lamb: 'He awende his naman mid þeawum. 7 wæs ða soðfæst bydel godes gelaðunge. se þe ær mid reþre ehtnysse hi geswencte.'[65] In the homily for St Stephen's day Ælfric had presented Paul as a tropological figure from whose imperfection and conversion the homily audience could learn and take comfort. Ælfric had operated consistently in exegetical mode in that homily and had not been distracted by anxiety about Paul's sinfulness. In the homily on St Paul he can be seen applying a similar exegetical approach; in, simultaneously, wishing to celebrate Paul as a saint, however, he introduces a strong element of hagiographical colouring that has the effect of working against the homiletic message.

CONCLUSION

We have considered in particular three apostles about whom Ælfric writes idealizing *passiones* celebrating their preaching and martyrdoms: Ælfric the hagiographer. But elsewhere in his writings – in his homilies – we also see Ælfric having to contend with the sins and failings of these apostles. To do so he deploys the generic tools of scriptural exegesis, finding good lessons for his audience in the providential transgressions of the apostles. What he does not do in either his *passiones* or his biblical interpretation is to explore the human dimension of the figures he writes about. Ælfric writes prolifically about the saints, among whom the apostles receive particularly close attention, but bringing them to life as struggling human beings is not part of his agenda as religious teacher.

[64] Godden points out (*Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, pp. 223–4) that in *Sermo* 279 (PL, 39, cols. 1275–80), one of the sources Ælfric used for his homily for the feast day of St Paul, Augustine stresses Saul's vindictiveness at the martyrdom of Stephen and accentuates his savagery (see col. 1276). For an account of Augustine's preoccupation with his own sinfulness in the *Confessions*, see K. F. Morrison, *Conversion and Text: the Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah and Constantine Tsatsos* (London, 1992), pp. 1–38.

[65] Lines 92–4: 'He changed his name with his character; and he was then a true proclaimer of God's church, who had before afflicted it with fierce persecution' (Thorpe, I, 391).

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